



**FROM THE DESK OF**

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**U.S. RAILROAD RETIREMENT BOARD**

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### **RRB Customer Service Plan Update**

The U.S. Railroad Retirement Board's Customer Service Plan promotes the principles and objectives of customer-driven quality service agency-wide. The RRB's plan states specifically the level of service that customers can expect, and an important part of the plan is a pledge to keep beneficiaries informed of how well the RRB is meeting the plan's standards. The plan is reviewed and updated periodically as the agency gains more experience with it, compares its service with the best in business and considers feedback received from its customers.

The following questions and answers provide information about the RRB's performance in the key areas of retirement applications, survivor applications, disability applications and payments, railroad unemployment and sickness benefit applications and claims, as well as the handling of correspondence during fiscal year 2005 (October 1, 2004 – September 30, 2005). Included are the customer service performance goals the RRB set for fiscal year 2005 in its Annual Performance Plan. These goals are revised annually based on such factors as projected workloads and available resources. Also included is information on the RRB's overall performance, as measured by the timeliness index developed by the agency.

#### **1. How does the RRB measure overall timeliness for customer service?**

The RRB developed an index to measure the overall timeliness of its customer service in four benefit areas: retirement applications; survivor applications; disability applications and payments; and railroad unemployment and sickness benefit applications and claims. This composite indicator, based on a weighted average, allows for a more concise and meaningful presentation of its customer service efforts in these benefit areas

#### **2. How timely, overall, was the customer service provided by the RRB in fiscal year 2005, as measured by this timeliness index?**

During fiscal year 2005, the overall benefit timeliness index stood at 98.6 percent. This means that the RRB provided benefit services within the timeframes promised in the Customer Service Plan 98.6 percent of the time. More detailed performance information for specific benefit areas is presented in the questions and answers that follow.

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**3. What standards were used by the RRB in fiscal year 2005 for processing applications for railroad retirement employee or spouse annuities and how well did it meet those standards?**

Under the RRB's standards, if you filed for a railroad retirement employee or spouse annuity in advance, you will receive your first payment, or a decision, within 35 days of the beginning date of your annuity. If you have not filed in advance, you will receive your first payment, or a decision, within 65 days of the date you filed your application.

Of the cases processed during fiscal year 2005, 93.5 percent of employee and 92.7 percent of spouse applicants who filed in advance received a payment, or a decision, within 35 days of their annuity beginning date. Taking these employee and spouse cases together, 93.1 percent of this group met the agency's standard for fiscal year 2005. Average processing times for employee and spouse applications were 16.0 and 9.8 days, respectively; the combined average processing time for these cases was 13.0 days.

Also, of the cases processed, 97.0 percent of employee and 97.4 percent of spouse applicants who had not filed in advance received a payment, or a decision, within 65 days of their filing dates. Taken together, 97.3 percent of these cases met the agency's standard. In these cases, the average processing times for employee and spouse applications were 19.8 and 18.5 days, respectively; the combined average processing time was 18.8 days.

The RRB's goals in fiscal year 2005 were 92.0 and 94.0 percent timeliness, respectively, for those filing in advance and those not filing in advance.

**4. What standards were used in the area of survivor benefits in fiscal year 2005?**

Under the standards, if you filed for a railroad retirement survivor annuity or a lump-sum benefit, you will receive your first payment, or a decision, within 65 days of the date you filed your application, or became entitled to benefits, if later. If you are already receiving a spouse annuity, you will receive your first payment, or a decision, within 35 days of the date the RRB receives notice of the employee's death.

Of the cases processed during fiscal year 2005, 89.4 percent of the applicants for an initial survivor annuity received a payment or a decision within 65 days. In addition, 96.9 percent of the applicants for a lump-sum benefit received a payment or a decision within 65 days. In cases where the survivor was already receiving a spouse annuity, 94.6 percent of the applicants received a payment or a decision within 35 days of the RRB being notified of the employee's death. Average processing time for all applications for recurring monthly benefits (initial survivor applications and spouse to survivor conversions) was 25.0 days. The average processing time for lump-sum applications was 11.3 days.

The goals for fiscal year 2005 were 80.0 percent and 90.0 percent timeliness, respectively, for payment of a survivor annuity and for payment of a lump sum. For those already receiving a spouse annuity, the goal was 90.0 percent timely for payment of the survivor annuity.

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**5. What standards were used by the RRB in fiscal year 2005 for processing applications for disability annuities under the Railroad Retirement Act?**

Under the Customer Service Plan, if you filed for a disability annuity, you will receive a decision within 105 days of the date you filed your application. If it is determined that you are entitled to disability benefits, you will receive your first payment within 25 days of the date of the RRB's decision, or the earliest possible payment date, whichever is later.

Of the cases processed during fiscal year 2005, 67.9 percent of those filing for a disability annuity received a decision within 105 days of the date they filed an application. The average processing time was 90.6 days. Of those entitled to disability benefits, 94.4 percent received their first payment within the Customer Service Plan's time frame. Average processing time was 8.4 days.

The agency's goals were 55.0 percent and 92.0 percent timeliness, respectively, for disability decisions and disability payments.

**6. What were the standards for the handling of applications and claims for railroad unemployment and sickness benefits and how well did the RRB meet these standards?**

Under the standards, if you filed an application for unemployment or sickness benefits, you will receive a claim form, or a decision, within 15 days of the date you filed your application. If you filed a claim for subsequent biweekly unemployment or sickness benefits, you will receive your payment, or a decision, within 15 days of the date the RRB receives your claim form.

During fiscal year 2005, 99.8 percent of unemployment benefit applications sampled for timeliness and 99.6 percent of sickness benefit applications processed met the RRB's standard. Average processing times for unemployment and sickness benefit applications were 0.3 and 1.4 days, respectively.

In addition, 99.8 percent of subsequent claims processed for unemployment and sickness benefits met the RRB's standard for fiscal year 2005. The average processing time for claims was 3.9 days.

The agency's goals for processing unemployment and sickness applications in fiscal year 2005 were 96.0 percent timely for both unemployment and sickness. The payment or decision goal for subsequent claims was 98.0 percent timely.

**7. What was the standard for replying to correspondence in fiscal year 2005?**

The Customer Service Plan states that when you inquire by letter, you will receive a reply within 15 days of the date the agency receives your inquiry. If for any reason the RRB cannot reply within that time frame, it will acknowledge the letter and tell you how long it will be before your questions can be answered fully.

In fiscal year 2005, 98.5 percent of all correspondence the RRB received was responded to, either with an acknowledgement or with a final reply, within the standard.

The goal for 2005 was set at 95.0 percent.

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**8. How did the RRB's performance in meeting its standards in fiscal year 2005 compare to its performance in fiscal year 2004?**

Fiscal year 2005 performance improved when compared to fiscal year 2004 for initial survivor applications, lump-sum death benefits, spouse to survivor conversions, disability decisions, unemployment benefit applications, sickness benefit applications, and unemployment and sickness benefit claims. The most marked improvement came in the rendering of disability decisions. For disability applications processed in fiscal year 2005, 67.9 percent of applicants received a decision within 105 days of their filing dates as compared to 55.9 percent in fiscal year 2004; and the average processing time for decisions improved to 90.6 days, as compared to 110.2 days last year. Also, the agency exceeded all of the customer service performance goals it had set for the year in its Annual Performance Plan.

**9. Can beneficiaries provide feedback to the RRB about the service they receive?**

A Customer Assessment Survey form is available in every field office allowing beneficiaries to evaluate the service they received and suggest how the agency can improve its service. Persons not satisfied with the service they received may contact the manager of the office with which they have been dealing or the regional director who is responsible for that office. Their names and addresses are available in each office.

The addresses and phone numbers of all the RRB's field offices are also available on the agency's Web site at [www.rrb.gov](http://www.rrb.gov) or by calling the toll-free RRB Help Line at 1-800-808-0772. The RRB Help Line is an automated telephone service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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